

RIBA's manifesto for a better built environment



The time to act is now

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Foreword

“ The time to act is now – the climate emergency, housing crisis and building safety demand urgent attention from the next government and the construction industry. Change is not happening at the scale and pace needed considering the extent and complexity of the challenges we face. With the clock ticking, it is imperative that we are pursuing effective climate action, including delivery of a robust strategy for minimising the carbon impact related to the built environment. This manifesto shows how the knowledge, expertise and experience of architects is key to helping the next government deliver a safer, better and more sustainable built environment. There is no time to waste. ”

Muyiwa Oki, RIBA President

We need further and faster action – time is running out

Addressing the climate emergency, solving the housing crisis and ensuring that people are safe in their homes requires significant and urgent change. While some progress has been made, we are not moving fast enough. We will not overcome today's challenges without going further and faster to deliver substantial improvements in the built environment – time is running out. The next government must deliver greater investment, more effective regulation and stronger leadership to create an inclusive, safe and sustainable built environment fit for both now and the future.

Delivering a safer, greener, and equitable built environment: our priorities for the next government

CLIMATE ACTION

The built environment is responsible for 37% of global energy-related carbon emissions. Deep carbon reductions within the sector are clearly needed to reach net zero. The next government must lead the way and set ambitious building regulations, embed sustainability within planning systems, reform public procurement and enable greener infrastructure.

However, we will not tackle global climate and biodiversity emergencies unless we change the way we design and construct buildings. Architects must play a leading role in delivering this, but we cannot do it alone. The sector must unite and work towards net zero, sharing information and breaking down silos to create a sustainable built environment.

- **Introducing regulation:** We must start setting whole life carbon (operational energy and embodied carbon) targets for new and existing buildings. New buildings should also meet water and health metrics as set out in the [RIBA 2030 Climate Challenge](#).
- **Prioritising retrofitting our existing housing stock:** By introducing a National Retrofit Strategy, a long-term plan and investment programme, we can upgrade the energy efficiency of our housing stock while also addressing incentives and skills gaps.
- **Improving procurement processes:** To drive quality improvements and deliver value for money, we must measure the real-world performance of buildings through Post Occupancy Evaluation on buildings which receive public funding.

HOUSING AND PLANNING

The next government must commit to real change: boosting the supply of new homes, promoting higher standards, and prioritising quality. These are issues that continue to cast a cloud over the built environment sector. Now is the time to refocus. We must collaborate to design and build high-quality, accessible and future proof buildings and places.

Ineffective and unintegrated approaches to planning have often led to poor quality, unpopular developments. Local authorities must be comprehensively resourced to be able to recruit and retain highly qualified planners and design professionals – including utilising the skills of architects. A marked increase in the skills and capacity available to local planning authorities across the country will give them the knowledge and confidence to create and build high-quality, well-designed developments, empowering local decision-making without interference from national politicians.

Everyone has the right to an affordable, safe and sustainable home. To make this a reality, we must rethink how houses and places are planned, designed and built to meet the needs of communities both now and in the future.

- **Boosting supply:** Reviving public sector-led house building is key to delivering the homes we need, in the areas that need them – while also addressing the issue of quality in new homes.
- **Creating places, not just homes:** Housebuilding needs to be more than just a numbers game. New settlements must be well-designed, well-connected, inclusive and accessible, vibrant places where people are able to enjoy high standards of living.
- **Investing in planning departments:** Local authorities must be empowered and resourced to promote high-quality placemaking. By focusing on strategic, proactive and holistic approaches to planning, we can shape our built environment to be welcoming and safe for all in the long term. To do this, the next government must give local authorities the resources they need to invest in planning teams and demand better design standards.
- **Prioritising proactive planning:** Expansions to permitted development rights and viability loopholes in the planning system need to be closed. The next government must focus on creating a level playing field that ensures that all homes and buildings meet the same standards of scrutiny, sustainability, safety and quality.

BUILDING SAFETY

Since the devastating fire at Grenfell Tower in 2017, we have been advocating for stronger regulation to make the built environment as safe as it can be. Welcome progress has been made, but there is still much more work to be done. We urgently need stronger, clearer and prescriptive baseline fire safety requirements. We also have crumbling public sector buildings. We must rebuild our public estate to ensure it is safe and high-quality for the future.

- **Ensuring regulations work together:** Approved Document B must be fully examined, to ensure a holistic review of fire safety which also addresses tall buildings.
- **Providing safer means of escape:** The implementation of an 18-metre threshold for second staircases in new residential buildings must be as swift as possible. Existing single staircase residential buildings over 18 metres should be refurbished with appropriate safety measures when undergoing refurbishment work.
- **Protecting vulnerable residents:** Sprinklers must be standard in all settings where vulnerable people are living.
- **Improving our existing public sector buildings:** Private finance must be mobilised to unlock a wave of improvements to our crumbling public estate.

CREATING AN INCLUSIVE AND GROWING PROFESSION

British architecture is a global success story. Architects come from around the world to practice and study here because British practices and universities have a reputation for excellence and innovation.

Brexit has provided the opportunity to explore new free trade deals and open up markets for UK architects to export to. The next government must continue with positive work already undertaken in this area. However, more needs to be done to ensure we have a pipeline of diverse architects working for UK practices both here and abroad.

- **Maintaining close links to neighbouring countries:** The EU Mutual Recognition Agreement should be agreed as a priority to ensure UK architects can work in the European Union and vice versa.
- **Improving funding for architectural education:** Funding for architectural education must reflect the funding levels of comparable subjects to ensure a competent profession.
- **Creating a more inclusive and diverse profession:** More flexible and affordable routes to becoming an architect must be created to open up the profession.